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## THE CLEAVAGE BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN VIRGINIA

EASTERN and western Virginia in the ante-bellum days were unlike socially, politically, and economically. Their differences were due primarily to geographic influences. East of the Blue Ridge of mountains the surface is generally level, the climate even, and the soil adapted to the growth of staples. Here the industrial and social life centred in the large estate,<sup>1</sup> which had its origin in the nature of the agriculture adopted and in the institution of negro slavery. In many respects the plantation was self-sufficing. It furnished the raw materials which negro slaves converted into means of subsistence. Only the surplus staples went to purchase foreign luxuries and such articles as could not be grown or manufactured upon the estate. To the plantation owner the patronage of manufacturing on a large scale was a secondary and incidental thing, designed chiefly to supply luxuries. The broad arms of the Chesapeake, extending far inland, afforded the means of free commercial intercourse and early accustomed the Virginia planter to regard freedom of international trade as a prerogative. To him tariff walls were unnatural, and interference with established institutions was meddlesome, to say the least. From the outsider he desired little except the undisturbed enjoyment of his "rural simplicity".

West of the Blue Ridge of mountains the surface is either mountainous or hilly, the climate uneven, and the soil adapted to grazing and farming. These geographic barriers checked the westward extension of the plantation system and the early development of the transmontane country. When population at last pushed into that section, it came largely from the northern colonies and was composed of a variety of nationalities, the Scotch-Irish and Germans being the most important elements.<sup>2</sup> In both their manner of settlement and their mode of living, the westerners were unlike the eastern planters. Except the earliest pioneers, they had occupied and conquered the wilderness in bands of congenial families. With them the industrial and social life centred in the small farm, which

<sup>1</sup> Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia*, I. 569; *id.*, *Social Life of Virginia*, chs. III. and IV.; Wirt, *Henry*, pp. 32 ff.; Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia* (ed. of 1787), pp. 261-270; Tucker, *Jefferson*, I. 19; Rowland, *Mason*, I. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Kercheval, *History of the Valley*, p. 68.

was usually operated by its owner and the members of his family. The small communities and the villages, which sprang up in their midst, proceeded like the eastern plantations to become largely self-sufficing. The sale of live stock and surplus farm products, which found a ready market in Baltimore and Philadelphia, provided the westerners with those articles of luxury and manufacture which could not be produced at home.<sup>3</sup> A homogeneity of interest taught the various communities to make common efforts to secure better markets and means of access to them. When capital began to accumulate, a desire arose to develop the rich natural resources, the strata of coal and the forests of timber. Already schooled in the defense of community interests the westerners then became the advocates of vast schemes for internal improvements and a protective tariff.

Although the annals of Virginia record the events of sectional contests in the early colonial days,<sup>4</sup> it was not until the cismontane and transmontane societies came into contact that the integrity of the commonwealth was seriously endangered. In the period immediately preceding the American Revolution several schemes for new colonies, to be erected out of Virginia territory in the Trans-Alleghany, were proposed.<sup>5</sup> In Virginia the movement which culminated in national independence was largely a revolt of the democratic interior, under the leadership of Patrick Henry, against the conservative lowland, under the leadership of Pendleton and Randolph.<sup>6</sup> But independence added only new zeal and purpose to the participants in these sectional controversies. To defend his home against attacks by the savages and to secure a more adequate means of internal communication the westerner felt the imperative need of a strong national government.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Whig planters desired the greatest local autonomy. When "a more perfect union" was finally formed, the westerners defended it out of pure patriotism. To them it was their nearest realization of a democratic government; it guaranteed to every thirty thousand of its citizens an equal representation in Congress, whereas the state constitution of 1776 denied to the large western counties an adequate

<sup>3</sup> *Debates of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830*, p. 452.

<sup>4</sup> Spotswood, *Letters*, II. 98-99.

<sup>5</sup> Alden, *New Governments west of the Alleghanies before 1780* (Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin Historical Series, vol. II., no. 1).

<sup>6</sup> Tyler, Henry, p. 56; *Journal of the House of Burgesses* (ed. Kennedy), 1766-1769, pp. x-xxi; Wirt, Henry, pp. 69-75. The interior counties of the Piedmont co-operated with the transmontane country in the movement for independence.

<sup>7</sup> *Virginia Historical Collections*, X. 18, 27, 40.

voice in either branch of the state legislature.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the easterners maintained their undemocratic rule over their western brethren, while they preached the greatest individualism in federal relations. Accordingly, the westerners voted for the adoption of the federal Constitution,<sup>9</sup> against the Resolutions of 1798,<sup>10</sup> and against the various resolutions favorable to Nullification and Secession proposed in 1832.<sup>11</sup> In the first instance the commercial interests of the Tidewater combined with the west and brought victory, but on each of the subsequent occasions the west was in a hopeless minority.

During the quarter century from 1825 to 1850 the sectional controversies in Virginia were conducted with great zeal but with little organization. The west was the growing and aggressive section; the east the declining and conservative one. Every move on the part of the former for a proportionate representation in the general assembly and a proportionate expenditure of the state revenues was met by the reminder that the taxable property and population of the east were greater than that of the west and that the east possessed a "peculiar species" of property, negro slaves, the possession of which could be guaranteed and secured only by giving to masters a voice in the government adequate to the protection of their interests.<sup>12</sup> It was during this period that the easterners began to ridicule and to declare impracticable the "abstractions" and "metaphysical subtleties" of Thomas Jefferson and thus to insist upon the rule of the minority as opposed to the rule of the numerical majority. On the other hand, the westerners attacked both the practice of unequal representation and the institution of negro slavery. In them they saw the sole causes of their political degradation and of their arrested social and economic development.<sup>13</sup> Arguments opposing and supporting these two extremes were poured forth in profusion in the Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830 and in the assembly of 1831-1832, where the expediency of legislating upon the abolition of negro slavery was the chief subject of discussion. But the west lost in each contest, and there are few years during the period from 1830 to 1850 which did not bring forth schemes for the

<sup>8</sup> *Debates and Proceedings on the Virginia Resolutions of 1798* (ed. of 1835), pp. 81, 176. Each county was allowed two representatives in the House of Delegates. This gave the small eastern counties political control over the larger and more populous western counties.

<sup>9</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, III. 649-650.

<sup>10</sup> *Debates and Proceedings on the Virginia Resolutions of 1798*, p. 212.

<sup>11</sup> Lynchburg *Virginian*, January 7, February 11, 1833; *Journal of the House of Delegates*, 1832-1833, pp. 79, 82, 88.

<sup>12</sup> *Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830*, pp. 72-88.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 123-125, 143, 425.

dismemberment of the commonwealth. Long articles appeared in many of the western prints suggesting suitable seats of government and executive officers for a new state to be erected west of the Blue Ridge.<sup>14</sup>

But the events of 1850 and 1851 changed the character of this sectional contest. The census of 1850 showed that western Virginia had a greater free white population than eastern Virginia and that the taxable property of the former section was rapidly increasing in amount. These facts and the necessity for local political accord, because of the impending national crisis, caused the easterners to relent. Accordingly the Reform Convention of 1850-1851 placed the westerners in practical control of the state government. With their citadel of strength in the Valley the Democrats now gained almost undisputed political control. Lavish appropriations for works of internal improvement were made and proposed; Joseph Johnson, the first and only person to be elected from the Trans-Alleghany, was made governor; and J. M. Mason, of the Valley, was re-elected to the United States Senate. The westerners also accepted the Compromise of 1850 as a final settlement of the various questions growing out of the existence of negro slavery in the South and its proposed extension to the Southwest. Since the days of Nullification a majority of the voters of their section had been Democrats of the Jacksonian type, whereas the Whig minority had adhered to the nationalistic wing of their party. It was thus easy for all parties at the west to sacrifice political prejudices and local interests for the preservation of the Union. Robbed of their western allies, the eastern Whigs ceased to be formidable, and the sectional contests ceased temporarily to be menacing.

But the period of political accord following 1851 was only the calm before the storm. The east grew more and more distrustful of the west, and in 1852 the eastern Democrats repudiated the Compromise of 1850.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile a new opposition party, the Know-Nothing, was forming in the east out of the remnants of the old Whig party and was rapidly extending itself to the west, where grave dissatisfaction with the educational and internal improvement policies of the state continued to exist. The mysteries surrounding the Know-Nothing organization, its liberal policy on the subject of internal improvements, and the avowed determination of its leaders

<sup>14</sup> *Kanawha Banner*, September 17, October 29, November 15, 1830; *Winchester Republican*, October 15, December 3, 1830.

<sup>15</sup> *National Intelligencer*, April 8, 1852.

to suppress further agitation of questions growing out of negro slavery appealed to the westerners.<sup>16</sup>

To avert this threatened defeat and disruption of their party the Democrats brought forward Henry A. Wise as their candidate for governor in 1855. Although in thorough sympathy with the slaveholding interests Wise enjoyed great popularity in the counties west of the Blue Ridge. Like William L. Yancey, of Alabama, who had espoused the cause of woman's suffrage, and other political leaders of southern black-belts, Wise saw, as did few other Virginians of his day, the expediency of political alliances between the comparatively non-slaveholding and the slaveholding districts of the Southern States and the necessity as a means thereto of conceding some of the demands of the non-slaveholding sections. He had long been an advocate of the public free school and the constitutional reforms desired by the west.<sup>17</sup> In the Reform Convention of 1850-1851 he had been the only delegate from the Tidewater who had spoken with and voted with the delegates from the west. Thus he had ingratiated himself in the feelings of the westerners until they felt that he was the only eastern politician whom they could trust. He was hailed by them as the preserver of the integrity of the commonwealth and as "the champion of the Union-loving indomitable Democracy".<sup>18</sup> Had he desired it the Democratic party of Virginia would have united to support him for the presidential nomination of 1856.<sup>19</sup>

The contest between Wise, the Democratic, and Thomas S. Flournoy, the Know-Nothing, candidate for the governorship and the victory of the former were events of political importance.<sup>20</sup> By his brilliant oratory and winning personality Wise clinched his hold upon the west. Its young men became his personal followers and admirers, and several newspapers, devoted to his interests, were established there. In the larger field of politics the result of this contest was to prevent the threatened extension of Know-Nothingism to the Southern States, to kill temporarily the opposition party in Virginia, and to place Wise before the country as a possible candidate for the presidency. A united party under

<sup>16</sup> Wise, *Wise*, pp. 170 ff.; *id.*, *Seven Decades of the Union*; Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 516; Hambleton, *Virginia Politics in 1855 and Life of Henry A. Wise*, pp. 60 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Wise, *Wise*, pp. 105, 162-163.

<sup>18</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, April 30, 1856.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, April 13, 20, 27, 1857; Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 520-526.

<sup>20</sup> Wise's majority was more than ten thousand, less than one thousand of which came from the counties east of the Blue Ridge. *Whig Almanac* for 1856, p. 56.

his leadership gave James Buchanan the largest majority yet given by Virginia to any Democratic candidate for the presidency and secured the election of the first solidly Democratic delegation to represent Virginia in Congress.<sup>21</sup>

Masters at home but alarmed at the successes of the Abolitionists on the far western frontier, Wise and his political associates took up the programme, already popular in the Gulf States, for a united pro-slavery South. Their slogan was slavery extension and the preservation of Southern institutions and ideals. To this proposed new South they hoped, and not without assurances of success, to attach a united Virginia. Wise's popularity in the west and the conciliatory results of the Reform Convention of 1850-1851 were relied upon to win that section. Besides, slavery extension had always been popular in western Virginia. Its most representative citizens boasted of their Southern ancestry and of their devotion to Southern institutions, and its political leaders had always insisted that the extension of slave territory could not increase the number of negro slaves or the evils of slaveholding. In the debate over the admission of Missouri they had argued for the extension of negro slavery, because extension would permit dissemination and a consequent greater intimacy between master and slave.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the devotion of the former Whig element to the Union the Southern propagandists counted upon the united co-operation of eastern Virginia. The Jeffersonian theory of states' rights had always been popular there, and the new doctrine of minority rights, founded upon the Jeffersonian teachings, formulated by Calhoun, and expounded in Virginia by Abel P. Upshur and Benjamin W. Leigh, was every day becoming more and more popular with the masses. Moreover, the slave-owners of this section continued to derive large annual profits from the domestic slave-trade, and some of them, not without encouragement from such industrial leaders as Edmund Ruffin and others, hoped again to see negro slavery profitable economically.

One step in the pro-Southern movement was to make Virginia the intellectual and political head of a new South.<sup>23</sup> For this purpose the state university, whence should emanate the orthodox teachings on the nature of the federal government, was to be made the intellectual centre. To co-operate in this movement ministers and educators deserted their private and denominational institutions to

<sup>21</sup> Buchanan's majority was 25,548. *Tribune Almanac* for 1857, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 16 Cong., 1 sess., I. 996, 1000, 1268-1272.

<sup>23</sup> This plan had its inception with Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, *Writings* (ed. Ford), VII. 164, 204, 455.

write books and pamphlets in defense of the new educational movement and the institution of negro slavery. The public prints were also active. During the fifties the Richmond press contained many editorial articles written to deter Southerners from attending Northern institutions of learning and to lessen the influence of the "Yankee" school-teacher in the South.<sup>24</sup>

Under these influences the University of Virginia became a close second to Harvard in enrollment and attained a prominence never enjoyed before and scarcely attained since. The attendance rose from less than two hundred in 1848 to almost seven hundred in 1858.<sup>25</sup> The Richmond press praised it as the one institution of the country where "southern youths, who are united by common devotion to southern rights, to southern institutions, to southern manners, and to southern chivalry", could be educated in "like manner" and with "similar thoughts".<sup>26</sup> It also rejoiced in the disappearance of the Yankee school-teacher, in the fact that his place was being filled by those to the "manor born", and in the growing disposition of Southerners to patronize their own institutions of learning.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the university in the slaveholding sections of Virginia and in the lower South, it had few friends west of the Blue Ridge. There the Yankee school-teacher and the public free-school movement continued to hold their own. The inhabitants of western Virginia looked upon their state university as an institution established especially for the sons of eastern and Southern "nabobs". Consequently they opposed all efforts to increase the appropriations for it and to enlarge its faculty.<sup>27</sup> Instead of fostering higher education they maintained that the general assembly should make provision whereby "the men of small farms" could educate their children in the rudiments of learning.<sup>28</sup> E. W. Newton, editor of the *Kanawha Republican*<sup>29</sup> and a former Vermont school-teacher, urged through the columns of his paper the cause of the public free school and condemned higher education, when obtained at the cost of illiteracy to the masses. In 1860 there were twice as many west Virginians attending colleges in the free states as there were students from that section enrolled in all the colleges east of the Blue Ridge in Virginia. Out of a total of three hundred

<sup>24</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, January 6, 1860.

<sup>25</sup> *House Document No. 12* of the assembly of 1858-1859.

<sup>26</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, December 2, 1856; July 12, 1859.

<sup>27</sup> *Journal of the House of Delegates*, 1841-1842, doc. no. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Kanawha Republican*, May 21, 1842.

<sup>29</sup> *The Republican*, published at Charleston, was the largest and best newspaper in Trans-Alleghany Virginia prior to the Civil War.



and seventeen Virginians attending the university in 1858-1859 only seventeen came from what is now West Virginia.

The westerners opposed also the movement, popular in the east, for a military training for young Southerners. In 1835 they voted against the act of the assembly whereby the academy and arsenal at Lexington were converted into a state military school. They continued to oppose appropriations to this institution and to refuse to patronize it freely, notwithstanding the fact that the state paid a portion of each state cadet's expenses.

The differences between the churches, especially the differences between those denominations which sprang from a division of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist denominations, had, by 1855, become a part of the political contests and were doing much to shape public opinion on political subjects. The Southern churches which arose from divisions within these denominations were defending Southern interests and institutions, and some of their ministers were defending the doctrine of the divine origin and plan of negro slavery. On the other hand, the Northern churches of a similar origin were condemning negro slavery as a sin and preaching against its extension into the territories.

Because of their greater importance these differences will be traced only as they manifested themselves in the contests between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Since 1844 these two churches had contended with each other for the church membership and property throughout a vast territory embracing the Eastern Shore, the Northern Neck, the Valley, and a large part of the Trans-Alleghany. When the Kansas controversy became acute the Southern church in the border adopted the policy of "carrying everything up to the Mason and Dixon line".<sup>30</sup> To accomplish this undertaking it sent agents and ministers into the disputed territory. On arriving there these representatives were met by persons sent out by the Northern church to retain its foothold in slave territory and to strengthen that hold, if possible. The discussions which took place between these two opposing sets of representatives were marked by the usual vituperation and bitterness of religious controversies and did much during the next half decade to shape antagonistic pro-Southern and pro-Union sentiment.

After 1856 the Methodist Episcopal Church in the border states championed the cause of the Union. Not unfrequently her ministers put to their congregations the plain question "Do you desire the dissolution of the American Union?" They were then plainly

<sup>30</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, September 15, 1857; March 9, 1859.

told that if they did not desire disunion, it was their duty "to speak out in thunder tones and tell these disunionists [the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South] that they shall not divide the church of the land by the line which separates the slave states from the free". "Tell them", said Rev. Wesley Smith, "that the Methodist Episcopal Church shall exist on slave territory to the end of time and that as a Heaven appointed instrumentality . . . we shall aid in preserving the integrity of the Union."<sup>31</sup>

In 1856 the radicals in the Methodist Episcopal Church secured control of its publications, which were henceforth used to denounce negro slavery and Southern institutions in general.<sup>32</sup> Those periodicals of the Northern church which circulated in western Virginia spoke without apology of "the stench, the suffocation, and the death" of slave society.<sup>33</sup> The Sunday-school literature in circulation there contained warnings against the temptations of "slave holding, stealing, and intemperance".<sup>34</sup>

By those who adhered to the Southern church these attacks were regarded as purely political. Consequently both the church and the political organs of pro-Southern sentiment felt called upon to answer them. In many instances it would have been difficult to tell from their contents whether or not the pro-Southern newspapers or periodicals of the Valley or the Trans-Alleghany were church or party organs. Both insisted upon it that the Methodist Episcopal Church was "an abolitionist, anti-slavery, anti-southern, and anti-Virginian institution" and that it was "more of a political than a religious organization".<sup>35</sup> Mass-meetings were held to protest against the "dissemination of sentiments derogatory and dangerous to our institutions". The resolutions passed at Boothsville, Marion County (now a part of West Virginia), are given as typical of those passed elsewhere. They are as follows:

1. Resolved, That, as the firm friends of the National Constitution, we pledge ourselves to oppose with manly firmness every attempt of northern abolitionists and of their coadjutors who are vainly seeking to conceal their dark purposes by fraud and disguise to beguile our people into an alliance with Black Republicanism.

2. That the present position of the northern division of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the slavery question, the action of its general

<sup>31</sup> *Defence of the M. E. Church*, pamphlet, by Rev. Wesley Smith. This pamphlet may be found in the office of the *Pittsburg Christian Advocate*, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>32</sup> Matlack, *Anti-Slavery Struggle*, p. 296.

<sup>33</sup> *Pittsburg Christian Advocate*, August 21, 1857; *Kanawha Valley Star*, September 1, 1857.

<sup>34</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, January 12, 1858.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, October 20, December 8, 1857.

and annual conferences, and the course taken by its editors and clergy prove it to be as thoroughly abolitionist as any party organization in the country.

3. That we ask as a special favor of the Methodist Episcopal Church and any other Church that may consider this country a part of their moral vineyard for the future, to send among us only such ministers as have wisdom and grace enough to enable them to preach the gospel without meddling with our civil institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the political movements which combined with them, the importance which the contests in religious matters had in shaping antagonistic pro-Southern and pro-Union sentiment in Virginia has been greatly minimized. But many of the older residents of northern West Virginia insist to this day that "the Methodist Episcopal Church dismembered Virginia". The historical accuracy of this statement may be justly questioned, but it is significant that the pro-Union and pro-Southern strength of western Virginia in 1861 could have been measured and located by determining the membership and location of the various churches of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, respectively.

The diverse sectional development along economic lines was as marked as in educational and religious matters. Edmund Ruffin and other leading agriculturists of eastern Virginia now joined their political associates in the assertion that their state could hope to regain her fallen prestige and sunken fortunes only by increasing her slave population and by maintaining the domestic slave-trade. In some of the ablest pro-slavery arguments of the ante-bellum period, these leaders defended negro slavery as an economic good and necessity, ordained and sanctioned by God. For the first time in Virginia history large numbers of the masses joined her politicians to condemn the "political heresies" of Thomas Jefferson.<sup>37</sup> The annual commercial conventions of the South, forerunners of the Confederacy, were attended by many delegates from eastern Virginia, who took a sympathetic part in all the proceedings except those connected with the movement to reopen the African slave-trade. So enthusiastic did certain eastern politicians become over the Southern programme that the Richmond press professed to believe the political union of Virginia consummated. Occasionally it threatened those isolated sections of the west which showed marked Abolitionist tendencies with unfriendly legislation and other marks of disfavor.

On the other hand the west took little or no interest in the Southern commercial conventions. Always true to the individualism of

<sup>36</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, September 15, 1857.

<sup>37</sup> De Bow, *Review*, XXIV. 584; XXVI. 415 ff.; see Edmund Ruffin, *Political Economy of Slavery*.

Jefferson, western leaders now contended that the easterners had forgotten their original states'-rights doctrines and that they had become advocates of Southern rights and minority rights instead. They opposed "a union of all parties at the South for the defense of the South", because, said they, "such a course will lead to a union of all parties at the North for the destruction of the South", or the dismemberment of the Union.<sup>38</sup> True to the teachings and plans of the fathers they believed negro slavery an economic evil and hoped for the day when it should be abolished.<sup>39</sup> The western prints also commented freely upon the fact that the Richmond newspapers had "during the discussion over Kansas" changed from "the strictly states rights sentiment to the position of one defending the South".<sup>40</sup> They received the attacks upon the Abolitionist communities of the west as attacks upon the section as a whole. In answer to a threat made by the *Richmond Examiner* against the western Abolitionists the *Guyandotte Union* said: "You know not what it awakens in the bosom of honest patriots! Leave Guyandotte . . . to the quiet and peaceful enjoyment of negro worship! Oh! *Examiner! Examiner!* you know not how you sink the hearts of this people. Thou hast wounded the spirit that loved thee."<sup>41</sup>

The internal improvement legislation and activity of Wise's administration was determined largely by the programme for a united pro-Southern Virginia. To conciliate the west and to counteract the influence of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which was diverting the traffic of northwestern Virginia to Baltimore, the long-neglected scheme for a continuous railroad through central Virginia by way of the James and Kanawha rivers was revived and favorably received in the east. Of this proposed road and its purpose the *Richmond Enquirer* said: "This very region [western Virginia] is the seat of a large portion of the military strength of the state, containing as it does a majority of the white population. *It is as if we had a citadel filled with men and out-works feebly manned with no communication one to the other.*"<sup>42</sup> Of the same scheme the *Kanawha Valley Star*, a western newspaper in sympathy with the pro-Southern programme, said: "We now come to . . . the gradual preparation of Virginia for the great future struggle that every revolving year is hastening upon her: The struggle whose issue will be states rights and constitutional union, or

<sup>38</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, July 14, 1857.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26, September 23, 1857.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, September 8, 1857, quoting the *Wheeling Argus*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, October 13, 1857, quoting the *Guyandotte Union*.

<sup>42</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, August 10, 1855; see De Bow, *Review*, XIX. 445 ff.

a union of power untempered by law, unchecked by constitutional guarantees, ruled only by a fickle, irresponsible, fanatical majority."<sup>43</sup>

After delays caused by the financial panic of 1857 the scheme for connecting the James and Kanawha rivers was revived, but the railroad as a means thereto had fallen into disfavor. The long-abandoned scheme for a continuous waterway was again proposed. Its promoters thus hoped to divert commerce from the Erie Canal route and to make Norfolk a commercial rival of New York City. To complete these plans William Ballard Preston was sent abroad, and was authorized to negotiate with a French syndicate, which, it was hoped, would furnish means to complete the canal and to establish a direct steamship line between Norfolk and Nantes.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact that the railroad was daily becoming more practicable as a means of communication, the scheme for a continuous canal through central Virginia gained in favor; and on the eve of Secession the rights and privileges of the old James River Company were given to French parties, who contracted to complete the proposed canal and to maintain direct communications between Virginia and France.<sup>45</sup>

Despite their growing desire for internal improvements the westerners did not co-operate with these belated efforts to connect eastern and western Virginia commercially. The inhabitants of the Kanawha Valley condemned the canal as impracticable and demanded a continuous railway instead. On the other hand, the inhabitants living along the Baltimore and Ohio and the Virginia and Tennessee railroads instructed their representatives in the general assembly to vote against appropriations for either a railroad or a canal to pass through the central part of the state.<sup>46</sup>

These sectional differences manifested themselves most strikingly, however, in the political contests of 1859 and 1860. The absence of a formidable opposition party and a lack of sympathy in the west for the pro-Southern programme threatened again to disrupt the Democratic party. Wise, the former political idol of the west, was now rapidly falling into disfavor there. The western-

<sup>43</sup> February 24, 1857.

<sup>44</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, January 19, 1858; Wise, *Wise*, p. 221; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the James River and Kanawha Company*, p. 449.

<sup>45</sup> This French syndicate was interested in coal lands in western Virginia. It owned a large tract known as the "Swan Lands". See *Forty-first Report of Board of Public Works*; also *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the James River and Kanawha Company*.

<sup>46</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, April 6, 1858, April 16, 1860; *Journal of the General Assembly*, 1855-1856, p. 486.

ers did not like his activity in behalf of the Southern programme. Their prints now spoke of him as a "southern rights man" and not a "states rights man" and as being "bold without discretion and generous without judgment".<sup>47</sup> They refused to follow any leader who boastfully considered himself "a bold man in place, having their confidence and thus able to effect a union"<sup>48</sup> of the Southern people. Moreover, the old Jacksonian Democrats of the west could not understand why Mr. Wise should repudiate the Buchanan administration.<sup>49</sup>

R. M. T. Hunter, who, since the death of Calhoun, had lost much of his former enthusiasm for a united pro-slavery South, was rapidly displacing Wise as the leader in the west. Besides his conservatism and loyalty to the federal administration Hunter had other qualities which appealed to the westerners. Above all he was a firm believer in the Jeffersonian theory of states' rights. Also, he did not insist, as did Wise, upon committing the Democratic party, by platform or otherwise, on the subject of slavery extension. An easterner and an orthodox Southerner in every respect, he insisted that issues would not soon arise to necessitate such a course by the Democrats.<sup>50</sup>

By 1859 both Wise and Hunter were avowed candidates for the presidency, and as such each sought the support of Virginia to secure the nomination of the Democratic party.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly their respective adherents sought to name the gubernatorial candidate of that party and thus to secure control of the state organization. The supporters of Wise favored the nomination of John W. Brockenbrough, a resident of the east but widely and favorably known in the west, which section he had served for years as a federal judge. On the other hand the Hunter men favored the nomination of "honest John" Letcher,<sup>52</sup> the political idol of the "Tenth Legion", the Democratic stronghold of the Valley, and the choice of Virginia's representatives in Congress.

The contest between Letcher and Brockenbrough for the gubernatorial nomination was severe. It marked a decided departure from the methods and issues of previous campaigns. Despite the repeated assertions of their aversion to the injection of negro slavery into politics and religion Virginians now suffered it to be-

<sup>47</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, August 16, 1859.

<sup>48</sup> Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 521.

<sup>49</sup> Wise, *Wisc*, p. 236; *id.*, *Seven Decades of the Union*, p. 246.

<sup>50</sup> The *John P. Branch Historical Papers*, vol. II., no. 2, pp. 40-55; *Richmond Examiner*, May 31, 1860.

<sup>51</sup> *Richmond Whig*, March 3, 1859; *New York Tribune*, June 16, 1859.

<sup>52</sup> *Kanawha Valley Star*, October 12, 1858.

come the leading issue in a political contest within their own state. Because he had endorsed the "Ruffner Pamphlet" of 1847,<sup>53</sup> which proposed to divide Virginia into two districts, the eastern to be slaveholding and the western to be free, the Richmond newspapers denounced John Letcher as an "abolitionist and a free-soiler" and favored the nomination of Brockenbrough.<sup>54</sup> The orthodoxy of the candidates upon the subject of negro slavery was really the only issue in the contest. Considering the nature and the location of the opposition, Letcher's victory was doubly significant.

So heated was this contest that it resulted in more than one duel between leaders of the Democratic party. The "affair of honor" between O. Jennings Wise,<sup>55</sup> son of Governor Wise and an ardent pro-Southerner, and Sherrard Clemens, the representative of north-western Virginia in Congress and leader of the Letcher forces in the Trans-Alleghany, was of subsequent political importance. While Clemens lay at the point of death suffering from the wound which Wise had inflicted upon him, his constituents took up his fight. They assailed the "blood and thunder" methods of the pro-Southern leaders and repeatedly avowed their determination not to follow them. "The gunpowder popularity of Wise is so great", wrote a correspondent to the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, "that he [Clemens] can be re-elected upon an independent ticket."<sup>56</sup>

The strife within the Democratic party revived hope in former Whigs and Know-Nothings, who now again organized themselves into an opposition party and named William L. Goggin, an eastern man of strong pro-Southern sentiments, as their candidate for the governorship.

The contest between Goggin and Letcher was simply a continuation of that between Brockenbrough and Letcher. Wise and the *Richmond Enquirer* gave Letcher only a half-hearted support, both at times being accused of desiring the election of Goggin.<sup>57</sup> Follow-

<sup>53</sup> Dr. W. H. Ruffner, president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee), was the author of the pamphlet which bears his name. It had a wide circulation in western Virginia and received the endorsement of many of her prominent leaders.

<sup>54</sup> *Richmond Whig*, January 7, March 15, 1858; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 2, 1859; *Kanawha Valley Star*, July 6, October 19 and 26, November 9 and 16, 1858.

<sup>55</sup> See *Richmond Enquirer*, September 14, 1858, and the ensuing issues; *Kanawha Valley Star*, September 21 and 30, 1858.

<sup>56</sup> January 17, February 18 and 19, 1859. When the ordinance of Secession was adopted by Virginia, it was Clemens, still upon crutches, who led the delegates from western Virginia to his room in the Ford Hotel and took the first steps leading to the formation of West Virginia.

<sup>57</sup> *Richmond Whig*, March 24, April 22, May 25, 1859; *Kanawha Valley Star*, May 24, 1859.

ing the cue of the *Richmond Whig* the eastern prints repeated the charges of Freesoilism made against Letcher. Editorial combats between the eastern and western newspapers followed. For example the *Richmond Whig* said: "We impeach him [Letcher] of warring upon the fundamental interests of the state . . . upon the institution of slavery itself and of endeavoring to exterminate it root and branch." To this the *Wheeling Intelligencer* replied:

It is more particularly that part of the sentence which speaks of slavery as "the fundamental interest of the state" that we have singled out and it is to it in particular that we call the white working men of Western Virginia. We ask them if they are disposed to enter into an opposition contest upon this issue with John Letcher? Do they for this reason also impeach John Letcher?<sup>58</sup>

Notwithstanding Letcher's repudiation of his former Abolitionist tendencies, he owed his victory over Goggin to them and to the lack of sympathy in western Virginia for the pro-Southern programme. East of the Blue Ridge the total majority was against him, but west thereof he carried every Congressional district except one. Two Congressional districts bordering upon Ohio and Pennsylvania gave Letcher almost 4500 majority in a total majority vote of only 5569.<sup>59</sup>

That both the cause and the significance of Letcher's election were understood in eastern Virginia and elsewhere is evident from the editorial comments upon it. The *Richmond Whig* said: "Letcher owes his election to the tremendous majority he received in the Northwest Free Soil counties, and in these counties to his anti-slavery record" and "By the vote of Virginia and Virginians Wm. L. Goggin is today the Governor elect by thousands. But the Yankeeism and Black Republicanism of the Pan Handle and other portions of the Northwest have carried John Letcher into the gubernatorial chair."<sup>60</sup> In the following manner the *Richmond Whig* recommended Letcher to the Republicans of northwestern Virginia as a suitable nominee of their party for the presidency: "His majority comes from that neighborhood and his Ruffner antecedents entitle him to the consideration of a convention proposed to be held where his best friends reside."<sup>61</sup>

Hunter's friends regarded Letcher's election as indicative of

<sup>58</sup> January 15, 1859.

<sup>59</sup> *Tribune Almanac* for 1860, p. 51; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 27, 1859.

<sup>60</sup> June 7, 1859. See also *Richmond Whig*, April 26, 1858, August 5, 1859, quoting the *National Era*; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 24, 1859, quoting the *Ohio State Journal*.

<sup>61</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 10, 1859. In 1860 there was talk of holding the Republican National Convention at Wheeling, Virginia.



success for themselves in the presidential contest. But before they were called upon to show their strength other events occurred which lessened Wise's popularity in the west, if not in all parts of the state. Few Virginians disapproved of Governor Wise's conduct in connection with John Brown's Raid, but many became disgusted with his subsequent voluminous letter-writing in an effort to keep the John Brown affair before the people.<sup>62</sup> They refused to be alarmed because of the acts of an Abolitionist fanatic and insisted that Wise desired to make political capital of them by placing behind his presidential boom a united and alarmed South ready to look to him as its leader and deliverer. Consequently, many of the westerners opposed his plan for a conference of the Southern States to devise means for their protection, as well as the bills proposed by him and introduced in the assembly to provide for the establishment of any armory and for the better organization of the state militia.

When the Democratic State Convention met in the spring of 1860, neither Wise nor Hunter was able to control it, so evenly were their forces divided. Consequently, this convention did not attempt to instruct the delegates from Virginia to the Charleston Convention, but it called upon the voters in the several Congressional districts to express a choice between Wise and Hunter when they selected delegates to the National Convention.<sup>63</sup> A spirited canvass followed, but, to the surprise of many, Hunter received practically all of the delegates from the west and several of those from the east, who at Charleston, under the unit rule, cast the vote of Virginia for him to the very last.<sup>64</sup>

Defeat in the Charleston Convention and the subsequent inability to agree upon one candidate for the presidency brought further disorganization to the Democratic party of Virginia. Notwithstanding, the election of 1860 in that state was a triumph for conservatism and the Union. The only radical tendencies, either Northern or Southern, were shown by the handful of Republicans in the extreme northwest and by the eastern wing of the Breckinridge party. Not one of the three leading parties, the Constitutional Union, which secured the electoral vote of the state, the Breckinridge party, which came within four hundred votes of a plurality, or the Douglas party, was influenced to any great extent by the

<sup>62</sup> Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 551; *Kanawha Valley Star*, December 26, 1859, April 2, 1860; *Richmond Enquirer*, January 6, 1860.

<sup>63</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, February 28, 1860; Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 557.

<sup>64</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, February 28, 1860; *Richmond Whig*, July 9 and September 30, 1860; Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 557.

Southern programme. The rank and file of each of these parties continued to stand for the "constitutional union of the fathers".

The Douglas Democrats, found in largest numbers in the western counties and in the vicinity of Richmond, were for the "preservation of the Union". They claimed to be the only true Jeffersonian Democrats. On the subject of slavery extension, they opposed the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution, because that constitution had not been ratified according to the letter and spirit of the doctrine of popular sovereignty. They urged the election of their candidate as necessary to prevent the triumph of a sectional party.

The Breckinridge party made gains in the former Whig counties of the east, but its chief strength was in the old Democratic strongholds of the west. There it had the advantage over the Douglas party of a better claim to regularity. Because of their bitter and long-drawn-out contest with the opposition, party regularity had become a habit with many voters of the mountain and hill sections. Their only question was "What is the Democratic ticket?" The Breckinridge party also controlled the press, which had always been a potent influence with the Virginia voter. Two other factors operated to keep the westerners, many of whom soon joined the Union army, in line for the Breckinridge ticket. It also claimed to stand alone upon the Democratic platform of 1798, and the term "Jeffersonian Democracy" has always been dear to the Virginia mountaineer. Besides, Breckinridge enjoyed great popularity in the western counties. He lived in a neighboring state, and he had long been regarded as the political heir to the conservatism of the Great Pacificator.

The Constitutional Union party acted in the capacity of the old Whig and Know-Nothing opposition parties. Its votes came from former opposition strongholds, and, although it received the electoral vote of the state, its total vote, when compared with that given Breckinridge and Douglas, was not greater than the usual minority poll. The opposition of this party to Democrats of whatever type led the *Richmond Whig*, its mouthpiece, to pledge its support to "Seward a thousand times sooner than to any Democrat, Northern or Southern, in the land".<sup>65</sup> The Constitutional Union party stood for the conservatism of the Whigs and also for the Union of the Fathers as formulated in the doctrines of 1798. But that the eastern and western wings of both this party and the Breckinridge party differed greatly in their respective interpreta-

<sup>65</sup> September 30, 1859.

tion of "Constitutional Union" and the "principles" of 1798, there can be no doubt.

As is frequently the case in political contests, so in this one, the party casting the smallest number of votes soon became the most important. For this reason the Republican party of Virginia in 1860 deserves more than passing notice. Unlike the Constitutional Union and the former Know-Nothing parties, it did not pose as an opposition party. Its platform, adopted at Wheeling in 1860, declared that, since the administration party had come under the absolute leadership of Toombs, Yancey, and Davis, it had ceased to be the party of "Old Hickory" and had become a "Southern-British-Antitariff-Disunion party", and that opposition was no longer necessary or advisable. It insisted that the cotton planters of the lower South had made war upon the manufacturers of the North and that they were trying to drive capital from the mills into agriculture in an endeavor to increase the number and value of negro slaves. It also alleged that the slave interests of Virginia had encroached upon the personal rights of the free white men of her western counties by weighing them down with oppressive taxation and by denying them a proportionate representation in the general assembly. But this platform differs from the others chiefly in its clear exposition of the economic and political differences between eastern and western Virginia. It resembles them in that it, too, stood for the Union of the Fathers.<sup>66</sup>

Thus the dominating element in each of the four political parties in Virginia, in 1860, stood for the preservation of the Union and for conservatism. But when the Southern States began to secede, after the election of Lincoln, states' rights became the paramount issue, political parties began to disintegrate, and the Union-loving west lost its hold upon the political policies of the state. As has been said, the eastern and western factions of both the Constitutional Union and the Breckinridge parties differed widely in their respective interpretations of the principles of 1798 and of the nature of the federal government. For the most part the easterners, irrespective of party affiliations, believed sincerely that the states were sovereign and "in duty bound" to protect their rights and defend their territory. But with them diversity of opinion had been so great and devotion to the Union so strong that they had never been able to agree upon a means for protecting their rights. Some had refused to see serious infringements of rights in given cases; others had insisted upon fighting within the Union; others upon the right of a state to nullify a federal law; and still others

<sup>66</sup> See *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 3, 1860.

upon the constitutional right of peaceful secession. When Lincoln's call for volunteers raised the question of defending the state's territory, all these differences of opinion immediately crystallized, and the easterners presented a united front in favor of Secession.

On the other hand, the west had never doubted the ultimate sovereignty of the federal government. As has been seen, its representatives had voted for the ratification of the federal Constitution, against the Resolutions of 1798, and for the resolutions condemning Nullification. Thus when it came to a choice of an alliance with the Union or with their own state in a contest to determine the ultimate sovereignty, the inhabitants of the west did not hesitate to choose the former.

During the months immediately preceding the secession of Virginia the eastern and western parts of the state struggled with unprecedented vigor. The west fought for delay, opposing the proposed constitutional convention and extra session of the assembly, but the east held out and secured both. While these assemblies deliberated and other Southern states seceded, the germs of radicalism in the handful of Republicans in the northwest fed upon the discontent of that section and, throughout the district already prepared by the Letcher-Goggin campaign and the contest between the churches, grew into a formidable Union party. On the other hand, the germs of radicalism in the eastern wing of the Breckinridge party, which had long maintained a precarious existence upon the movement for a united pro-slavery South, were resuscitated. The accession of former Whigs increased its strength, and it soon grew into a well-organized Secession party of much greater vitality than its prototypes of 1832 and 1850. Under the influence of subsequent events it was impossible to prevent a clash between these two parties; impossible to keep the eastern radicals from carrying Virginia out of the Union and the radicals of the northwest from dismembering the "Mother of Commonwealths".

CHARLES H. AMBLER.